

Where Will the Wheat Ridge Branch Library Move?

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August 31, 2026



By Mike McKibbin / Neighborhood Gazette / Aug. 31, 2026

After nearly a half century, the Wheat Ridge branch library will have a new home in the near future.

At a special Aug. 20 meeting, Jefferson County Public Library trustees gave consensus to a recommendation to find a new site for the branch library.

Executive Director Donna Walker told the Neighborhood Gazette in an Aug. 21 phone interview that “a more optimal location” will be sought and added no specific site has been chosen. A cost estimate has not been developed either, she added.

The library is housed in the Seniors Resource Center, 5475 W. 32nd Ave., in what used to be Columbia Heights Elementary School.

A library staff recommendation to relocate noted a need “to grow (the branch’s) potential and support the community. A new location will help address current deficiencies regarding lack of

awareness and limited access, as well as providing space to do more and improving equitable access to library services.”

The Wheat Ridge branch is one of the library’s “group one” projects in its facilities master plan, which helps guide library infrastructure improvements. A 5- and 10-year capital improvement plan tracks spending on each project, along with annual library budgeting, Walker added.

“We have a mill levy, so it’s property taxes paid by county taxpayers,” she said.

The library system has no other funding source, Walker stated.

The county library system was established in 1952. Walker said the Wheat Ridge branch opened a year later as one of the four original libraries of the Jefferson County Public Library. It was located in the Wheat Ridge Grange.

Over the years, the library moved to different places and in 1979 — 47 years ago — it opened in its current location. Walker said the county holds a 99-year, \$0 lease with the Senior Resource Center.

“We’ve been talking to them about the lease,” she added. In August, trustees held closed sessions regarding the lease.

There is no timeline for finding a new site or to move, Walker noted.

“We’ll have to develop the criteria of what we feel we need for a location, hire a Realtor and work with (the city and others) on a suitable site,” she said. “It could take months or it could take years.”

Three possible sites could be considered

Development in Wheat Ridge is currently centered in three areas, Walker explained: the Lutheran Legacy Campus in downtown Wheat Ridge; the Stack at Wheat Ridge, 9859 W. 44th Ave.; and Clear Creek Crossing, at the southwest corner of Interstate 70 and Colorado Highway 58. All three are west of the current library, she added.

Walker said the library has had preliminary discussions with the city about the Lutheran Legacy site.

The approximately 100-acre downtown parcel was home to Lutheran Hospital — also called the Lutheran Medical Center — for more than a century. The facility moved to a 26-acre site at Clear Creek Crossing in August 2024.

Earlier this year, the library hired a Denver firm, Clermont Eliot, to work with staff on an outreach effort between March and June about the Wheat Ridge branch. That resulted in

1,027 public responses to surveys and 304 in-person conversations and interviews at local events.

Neither the survey nor other response-gathering methods asked about potential new locations for the Wheat Ridge branch. However, the Lutheran Legacy Campus was mentioned — unprompted — 26 times.

“Its centrality, civic co-location, and proximity to places residents already go were noted as possibly encouraging more library use,” according to a community engagement report presented to library trustees in July.

One-on-one interviews with 15 city and county elected officials and community leaders noted the favorable terms in the current lease. But the group had mixed views about staying in the current location.

Relocation opportunities (including Lutheran Legacy Campus) were raised as a way to anchor broader development. And the group noted a “narrowing window” to align the library with other timelines to capture these opportunities, the report added.

The Lutheran Legacy Campus was often mentioned by the group as an “ideal library location.” Other sites were also suggested as potential location opportunities.

Users have mixed feelings about current site, some unaware of location

Walker noted not all public survey responses were in favor of finding a new site: Roughly 50% described the atmosphere the current space produces as “cozy,” “convenient,” and “quaint,” the report stated. “Patrons like what the space feels like, even as they’re asking it to do more than its current size allows.”

On the flip side, “space feels too small or crowded” was the most-cited barrier (17%) to more frequent visits. Limited collection (15%) and inconvenient hours (14%) were other commonly identified barriers preventing more frequent visits to the current facility.

Walker said she was also surprised how many people said they didn’t know where the branch library was located (36%) and used another branch or neighboring library (76%).

The top five aspects of the Wheat Ridge branch that respondents said met expectations included:

Staff helpfulness (95%)

Welcoming environment (89%)

Ease of finding materials (86%)

Location and access (84%)

Parking availability (83%)

Conversely, aspects most cited in responses as needing improvement were:

Gathering space (40%);

Children's area (26%);

Materials such as books and movies (25%)

Clean and comfortable furniture (23%);

Open hours (21%)